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ABSTRACT

The Southeastern Wisconsin Workplace Communication Project is a workplace English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) resource and outreach program involving a partnership of businesses and adult educators in a rural area that has experienced an increase in new speakers of English in the manufacturing workforce. The guide provides workplace educators and administrators with information on a participatory approach to ESL programming and curriculum development. It consists of a case study of organizational language needs and services in a local business employing 700, about 65 percent of whose employees at one plant are non-native English-speakers. The four-step guide instructs the user to alternately read portions of the case study and follow directions to conduct an organizational needs assessment, implement participatory curriculum development for workplace ESL instruction, develop instructional materials, and conduct learner assessment. (MSE) (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education)

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Susan Hunt Lederman

Southeastern Wisconsin Workplace Communication Project Curriculum Development Guide

The Southeastern Wisconsin Workplace Communication Project is a workplace ESL resource and outreach program involving a partnership of businesses and adult educators located in a rural area of Southeastern Wisconsin which has experienced an increase of new speakers of English in the demographics of the manufacturing workforce. The goal of the project is to establish tools to replicate participatory approaches to programming and curriculum development in a workplace ESL program in manufacturing throughout the Southeastern Wisconsin region. This guide provides workplace educators and administrators with information on how to replicate the participatory process in workplace ESL courses.

1 Read the Case Study

1. Was an Organizational Needs Assessment conducted for the program in which you are now working?
2. If so, who were the participants (stakeholders) involved in the ONA?
3. How is student placement in the program handled?

Organizational Needs Assessment

In order to build a strong foundation for a Workplace ESL program, it's important to pre-assess the needs of the organization. The Organizational Needs Assessment (ONA) can provide information that not only assists participants in identifying program objectives, but it also integrates those objectives into the language program. The ONA covers a variety of perspectives for communication within the organization, and connects the sponsor and the learners of the program, thus strengthening the learning partnership within the organization. In order for the ONA to be successful, it requires input from all areas of the organization: managers, supervisors, union representatives, and workers. The ONA includes meetings with all stakeholders to identify the language requirements of the workplace; personal interviews and questionnaires; observation of and working with the learners during normal working hours; a tour of the workplace; and a collection of the organization's printed materials from which curriculum will be designed, e.g., training manuals, handbooks, brochures, trade magazines, company newsletters, invoices, customer orders, injury reports, safety notices, etc. (these items are referred to as realia). It is also helpful for the service provider to attend staff or committee meetings. Some considerations for an ONA may include:

- gender, race, age, and ethnicity of the potential learners
- recent modifications in the workplace, such as new technology or restructuring
- a variety of job tasks
- a communication network diagram
- diversity issues
- safety issues.

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As Sue Folinsbee notes in 'Teaching English In The Workplace', every organization has its own corporate

culture with possible hidden agendas, and the ONA can help to identify real, and not just perceived, language needs in the context of the workplace environment. For this reason the ONA should ideally be conducted objectively by a service provider from outside the organization.

Interviewing the learners is an integral part of the ONA, offering learners the opportunity to share their concerns, express their needs, become aware of the opportunities afforded by the program, and realize that they have an active role in planning the program. It is important to emphasize to participants that confidentiality will be maintained. This approach gives the learners a feeling of ownership in the program, identifies mutual interests within the organization, and instills a sense of teamwork between management and workers. In addition, speaking with the learners enables the provider to make some preliminary determinations as to the level of the course and how much of the curriculum will be supplemented by sources outside the organization's realia. It is important to note that employees are evaluated on what they know rather than what they do not know.

A learner needs assessment is just as vital to the ONA as the management interviews. Not only is collected data used to determine course objectives, but it also raises the learners' awareness of themselves as students. When do they speak English? When do they speak Spanish? What problems do they encounter in the community? At work? How have they learned the English they know thus far? In other classes? Through experience? All of these questions allow the learners to reflect on their personal needs, learning abilities, and what they hope to attain from this class.

Once the assessment is complete, the provider designs the curriculum. This process includes formulating objectives based on the ONA, choosing and developing materials, and determining the best methods for using the materials. As the learners progress, the provider will reevaluate the original objectives, or establish new ones, and revise the curriculum accordingly.

The ONA, when well planned and thoughtfully conducted, can establish a relationship of trust among the participants and provide a plan which can be followed in designing, conducting and reporting on the language program.

Follow-up Questions:

1. What is the purpose of teacher developed classroom materials?
2. What authentic materials would be appropriate and useful in your classroom?

Read the Case Study

Implementing Participatory Curriculum Development in Workplace ESL Programs

1. What approach to ESL curriculum development does your program use now? 2. How are learners currently involved in setting personal educational objectives? 3. How are learners involved in setting personal educational objectives?

The participatory approach to ESL curriculum design has, at its core, the imprint of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. Freire believed that the achievement of literacy and the empowerment that resulted from education were not merely personal goals, but social objectives that can only be attained when people work together. He contrasted this to traditional banking education in which teachers, the holders of knowledge, simply deposit information in students' minds. Freire saw the roles of teacher and student as reciprocal ones in which

information is exchanged. Elsa Auerbach, a leading figure in participatory curriculum development in adult ESL programs, describes participatory curricula as emergent, cooperative efforts at learning through themes that learners identify as being relevant to their lives. Critical reflection leads to plans for transformative action. When students have a voice in what they learn, that control and confidence extend to their personal lives.

Involving the learners as agents of change in their personal growth through education impacts the curricular process. In following a predetermined curriculum, the teacher tries to find the most effective ways to convey the information to the students. However, this is a one way process. In contrast, participatory curriculum development is interactive and ongoing. A key factor in the participatory approach is flexibility, in that the teacher must be willing to be open to student involvement, dialogue, and possible criticism, and ready to make adjustments in the class curriculum. In many cases, the curricular approach may not be purely liberatory--teachers who are from outside of the community often teach immigrants, especially in formal programs. Nevertheless, participatory approaches can be and have been incorporated into ESL programming. The higher degree of personal involvement demanded by the participatory approach requires that all participants (teachers and students) take risks.

Follow-up Questions:

1. What are the defining characteristics of participatory education?
2. How does participatory education differ from banking?
3. What ideas come to mind concerning the use of participatory education in workplace ESL?

Materials Development in Workplace ESL Programs

1. What types of materials are used in your current ESL program? 2. If textbooks are used, have you found them to be useful, adequate? 3. Are students encouraged to bring materials to class?

Educational materials used in a Workplace ESL program should be specific to each site in order to meet the needs of the business and the learners. Some published adult ESL material may be useful, but the service provider will develop the majority of the materials from the workplace environment.

Several factors influence the design of both the curriculum and the materials used including the physical environment of the facility, the equipment available (overhead projector, VCR, etc.), the range of skill levels among the learners, and the amount of time that learners can attend class. If at all possible class should be held in a room where the participants will be undisturbed by the noise and activity of the workplace. It's also important that learners be allowed dedicated time for class without being called back to their jobs.

Unless the program is large enough to allow for separate classes based on language skill level, there will be a mix of learners in the class with varying educational backgrounds and needs. This may be addressed by working as a group when possible, and dividing the class into smaller groups or pairs when more focused work is needed. Materials may need to be tailored to meet the needs of the different skill levels.

Curriculum and materials must also reflect the varying learning objectives of both management and workers. Employers and supervisors expect workers to gain the language skills required to perform specific tasks, while workers may be interested in improving their overall English language competency. The service provider reviews tape recordings, photos, videos, questionnaires and documents collected from the workplace to produce class materials which reflect language use on the job and the objectives of the course. Course objectives are those which have been identified by management as skills required for the job, and also those identified by the workers themselves as needed to raise their overall literacy level.

Photographs can be used to discuss the steps in a job sequence; to identify equipment, machinery, and materials used; and to discuss problem situations. Tape recordings provide an opportunity to practice listening and speaking skills, pick out key information, and find points of communication breakdown. Printed material from the workplace may include job descriptions, safety instructions, policy and standards manuals, time sheets, company and union newsletters, and accident reports.

Students should also have an opportunity to produce their own learning materials. Students could be provided with a camera and asked to photograph any job task or situation that they find difficult. The students can then use the photograph to explain the problem to the class, generating class discussion leading to a possible solution. Students should also be encouraged to bring to class any written materials or specific vocabulary with which they have difficulty. The advantage of using instructor and learner prepared materials that reflect the context of the workplace is that new materials can be developed to meet changing needs.

Follow-up Questions:

1. What is the purpose of teacher developed classroom materials?
2. What authentic materials would be appropriate and useful in your classroom?

3 Read the Case Study

Assessment and Evaluation

1. Does your current ESL program have an established methodology for learner assessment? 2. If so, what use is made of the results of that assessment? 3. Do students assess their own progress? 4. Do instructors engage in program evaluation?

One of the current trends in adult education, and one that is particularly appropriate in a workplace program, is authentic assessment (AA). Authentic assessment tools are those which are meaningful, learner oriented, and have value to the student outside the classroom. They include such tools as checklists, portfolios, reading and writing samples, and resumes. Authentic assessment places emphasis on student accomplishment and progress rather than grading. These assessment tools should be planned in conjunction with the curriculum so that they reflect the goals established for the program.

Assessment can be broken down into three categories: learner assessment by the instructor; self-assessment by the learners; and course or program evaluation. Individual programs may include one or more of these assessment methods in varying forms.

The type of learner assessment conducted by the instructor will be determined by the nature of the program and the students. It may involve a technique as simple as observation of each student's use of the four language skills of reading, writing, speaking, and listening in the classroom. The instructor may keep of log of these observations which will help him or her determine student progress and needs. The objectives set by the service provider and management will determine assessment criteria, and the format of the assessment, which could include check sheets, evaluation forms, interviews, student portfolios, and questionnaires. In a workplace ESL program it may also be valuable for supervisors and lead workers to participate in evaluation by making note of students' progress as reflected in the language use on the job.

Learner self-assessment can be a valuable tool for the students by making them aware of their own language use, and providing a non-threatening means of recording progress, and involvement in goal setting . Portfolios of student work provide a means of communication between the students and instructor and can include original writing, workbook exercises, tape recordings, or any other items which students find helpful

or interesting. A portfolio allows the student an opportunity to review their past work , with the instructor's corrections and comments, and make note of the progress they have made. Students can be provided with check sheets of class or unit objectives on which they can record their own skill levels, accomplishments, and tasks yet to be achieved. Learner self-assessment assists the instructor in identifying student progress and needs, and provides the learner with a means of participating in their own education.

In terms of program evaluation, a workplace ESL program is unique in that there are more participants involved. All stakeholders who provided input into the process of identifying objectives, planning curriculum, and developing materials will be involved in evaluating the program and making recommendations for improvement. Supervisors and management should have been apprised of student progress and the success or failures of the program on an ongoing basis, and therefore the final evaluation should come as no surprise. This is important since the final evaluation may determine the future prospects for the program. After the service provider as presented his or her final report all participants have an opportunity to review the objectives, determine whether or not they were appropriate, were they successfully met, and if not what changes should be made. As vested stakeholders, learners also should be involved in the final evaluation. A group discussion with learners and the instructor allows the students to express the feelings about good and bad experiences, expectations met or unmet, and ask for direction for future language skill development.

Follow-up Questions:

1. What is authentic assessment and how does it differ from traditional assessment?
2. Who should be involved in learner assessment?
3. What's the purpose of program evaluation?

Read Case Study

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1 Case Study: Albert Trostel Packings, Ltd.

During the summer of 1996, Albert Trostel Packings sponsored a participatory workplace ESL program targeted at beginning speakers in entry level positions: press operators and inspectors. Company management and employees were enthusiastic about the approach. Since the 1990 census, the southeastern Wisconsin workforce has undergone demographic changes. Wisconsin's Department of Workforce Development estimates the number of Hispanics in the Walworth County labor force to be about 1,700 people. Many are immigrants who do not speak English as a first language. This number, although small, represents a growth rate of about 34 percent over the last four years. Because of the labor shortage in this part of the state, employment opportunities are steadily growing. Local employers have realized that the labor pool is becoming multicultural and multilingual, and they are interested in helping all employees improve communication skills. Such was the case with Albert Trostel Packings, Ltd., a local employer of over 700, with one of their plants staffed to 65% by employees who speak English as a second language.

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2 Case Study: Albert Trostel Packings, Ltd.

An in-depth, comprehensive ONA usually takes three to six months to complete. Because of the limited time frame available, a modified assessment was conducted by Ms. Johnson for Albert Trostl Packings, Ltd. It included conferences with Ms. Cathy Meseberg, the Human Resource manager at Trostel's target facility in Whitewater, Wisc.; a facility tour; supervisor questionnaires; and language and needs assessment of the learners. (See Appendix A.) Conferences with Ms. Meseberg produced information about production operations, the responsibilities and job descriptions of the employees, the number of workers and supervisors for each shift, workday schedules, and an overview of the communication channels within the workplace. The following decisions resulted from these conferences:

- the program would be offered to all non-native English speakers at the plant;
- the program would be voluntary;
- dates and times for the classes were set;
- pre-course needs assessments would begin the week before class;
- a post-course evaluation and report would be produced at the end of the program.

The educator used questionnaires as a tool for gathering information from supervisory personnel that would assist in curriculum development and goal-setting. The answers from the questionnaires confirmed that oral communication had the highest priority, particularly on the factory floor. Other elements identified as needing improvement were reading and writing reports, completing charts, math skills, health and safety information, social language skills, and communication between workers and management.

Two tours of the Trostel work site were included in the ONA. The initial tour provided the instructor with an overview of the facilities and job duties. During the second tour the Production Manager described equipment and job processes into a tape recorder, while Ms. Johnson photographed workers completing job tasks, specific work areas, equipment, and signage posted in the work areas. The transcription of the tape recording and the photos were later used in the classroom. This observation of the factory provided the instructor with important information about work conditions, communications requirements, and job responsibilities that affected the learner's needs.

Individual learner assessment was also conducted in order to assist in learner placement and curriculum development. The learner needs assessment can be conducted in several different ways. One-to-one interviews with each prospective learner or small group discussions can be conducted before the classes begin. However, because of the timeframe involved, in-class assessment was chosen for this program. Some of the discussion was in Spanish to ensure that all learners understood the objectives of the exercise. The in-class assessment

was done on the first day of classes and began with the learners viewing an overhead transparency of a Mexican worker and his Anglo-American boss. In print, the worker explained that he lived in New Mexico, his boss spoke to him in Spanish, and he spoke a little English in the community. Consequently, the worker stated that he did not have any language problems. From this scenario, the learners were asked these and similar questions:

- Why does Arturo think English is not important?
- Is living in New Mexico different from living in Wisconsin? How?
- Is your situation similar to Arturo's? How is it different?
- Do you have language problems at work? In the community?

As the learners cited specific examples of their English needs, the consultant recorded them on the board. At the conclusion of the discussion the learners were given note cards to record five situations in the community and five situations at work that required English. These were then compiled and recorded on the board. It was explained to the learners that some of these selections would be used in the development of the curriculum.

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3 Case Study: Albert Trostel Packings, Ltd.

As a result of conferences between the service provider and management is was confirmed that classes would be held in a conference room and the instructor would have access to a copy machine, flip chart, TV, VCR and overhead projector. The size of the conference room afforded ample space for small group activities or paired practices, both common techniques used in teaching. It also allowed the learners to spread out their materials and to work on in-class assignments or projects. During the conferences the collection of printed company materials listed below, or realia, were also selected. The realia portfolio collected by Ms. Meseberg contained:

- personnel flow chart
- new employee orientation packet
- employee benefits package
- application for employment
- brochures
- time cards
- scrap lists
- newsletter
- accident report.

Lesson plans were developed around these items addressing both the language and social skills needed in the work situation. For example, a lesson on alphabetical and numerical order included time cards and the following activities:

- listen to a cassette tape of the supervisor explaining how workers check in on their shift
- ask students questions about the tape to check listening comprehension
- pass out copies of time cards; identify and define key vocabulary words (shift, overtime)
- identify the tasks involved and their sequence
- ask students to divide themselves into separate groups based on shifts worked
- with each student wearing a name tag, have each group alphabetize their names
- play the tape again and ask students to identify the verbs used

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4 Case Study: Albert Trostel Packings, Ltd.

At Trostel, language assessment was used to place learners in the program. Three pre-course tests were administered on three days to all non-native English speaking employees: the oral Basic English Skills Test (BEST), the English Literacy Skills Assessment (EL), and the Reading and Writing Skills Assessment (RAW). Twenty-eight Trostel LEP employees, from all three shifts, took the examinations, and results of the testing were more positive than expected. None of the workers tested at 0 level proficiency of the MELT performance level guide, and nearly one-third of the workers tested at the highest level of proficiency. Based on the range of scores fifteen workers were place in the program, resulting in a multi-level class.

A learner needs assessment was conducted on the first day of classes to identify the student's perceived language needs and to help establish a sense of ownership in the class.

Ongoing assessment was conducted by means of a weekly Checklist For Learning which allowed learners to identify vocabulary words which they had learned, and language tasks they had accomplished (e.g. ask someone to repeat something). The instructor produced a curriculum report at the end of the first and last five week periods of the course. These reports evaluated such categories as social exchanges, job-related language, grammar, and oral skills. In addition, learners completed a Mid-Course Learner Self-Assessment indicating their level of effort and progress in the four language skills, and including comments about their portfolios.

As part of the final report managers and supervisors were asked to complete an evaluation form indicating whether or not they had observed improvement on the part of the learners in the areas of conversation, self-confidence, and job skills, and whether they would recommend that the language class be continued.